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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 001162

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [ELAB](#) [EPET](#) [ENRG](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: STRIKE CONTINUES TO HOLD FOR FOURTH DAY

REF: A. ABUJA 1157

[B](#). ABUJA 1147

[C](#). ABUJA 1135

[D](#). ABUJA 1107

[E](#). ABUJA 1091

Classified by Ambassador Howard F. Jeter. Reasons: 1.5 (B & D).

[1](#). (U) SUMMARY: July 3 was relatively quiet in Abuja. Vehicular traffic was light, gas lines were growing and most offices and businesses had skeletal staffing. Indicating that the political opposition may be looking for ways to exploit the strike, the Embassy experienced a peaceful demonstration this morning of about 40-50 people protesting the April elections and discouraging the upcoming POTUS visit. Talks between the GON and the NLC ended without a follow-up meeting scheduled. Both sides appear to be sticking to their positions, for now.

[2](#). (U) Demonstrations occurred in Abuja on Wednesday in four separate locations; Port Harcourt, Zaria and Kano witnessed their first public demonstrations yesterday as well. In Port Harcourt, a confrontation between police and demonstrators produced unconfirmed reports of three students killed when the police used live rounds to disperse the rally. Negotiations between the GON and NLC reportedly broke off early this morning with no follow-on meeting scheduled. NUPENG ordered its employees to honor the strike and this action could affect crude oil exports. Air traffic controllers are reportedly joining the strike, which could limit domestic air travel. With a memorial service planned for slain ANPP figure Marshall Harry scheduled for Friday, Port Harcourt could be a potential flashpoint. What happens after Juma'at prayers in Abuja and other northern cities will also bear close watching. END SUMMARY.

ATMOSPHERICS

[3](#). (U) Wednesday's demonstrations in Abuja were more widespread than in previous days. Up to 100 people may have been injured at Abuja's Wuse Market when police attempted to disperse a crowd by firing shots and using teargas. Many of the injuries were caused by the panicked flight of hundreds from the market. Small gangs were reported to be smashing car windows in isolated areas of Abuja. In Port Harcourt, demonstrators were confronted by security officers who used teargas to disperse the crowd. According to witnesses, some demonstrators responded by throwing rocks at the police, who fired their weapons at the crowd. Reports of three deaths have not been confirmed.

[4](#). (U) In the northern town of Zaria, about 1000 demonstrators took to the streets on Wednesday. Police intervened to halt the protest by firing teargas into the crowd. Kano experienced a peaceful demonstration, with at least 3,000 protestors. Governor Shekarau commiserated with the strikers and ordered security to allow the demonstration to continue as long as it remained peaceful. At the Emir's Palace, the Emir Ado Bayero, a supporter of Obasanjo, also told the crowd the price hikes had surprised him.

[5](#). (U) The strike appears to be holding, if not actually picking up steam in many parts of the country. Workers generally are honoring the strike. For instance, in Lagos activity was minimal again. NLC supporters continue to impede traffic to and from Lagos' Murtala Mohammed International Airport. In the Northeast, workers in Yola and Maiduguri remained strike compliant. Most banks, gas stations and businesses remained closed. Government offices were significantly understaffed despite reported talk of punitive government action against striking civil servants. In the South-South, Calabar is reportedly calm, but government workers are staying away from the offices. There was a demonstration in Aba, Abia State with some violence. Fuel, already limited before the strike, is generally unavailable throughout the country.

NEGOTIATIONS: ON OR OFF?

16. (SBU) According to government sources, the current session of negotiations between the GON and NLC ended this morning with no follow-on meeting scheduled (although a meeting could be arranged later today). Senior NLC officials and other Embassy labor sources reported the negotiations were "a failure." While the GON is publicly touting progress towards a compromise, NLC sources privately say the two sides have made little progress. While many claim that a deal is in the offing, a NLC official told Econoff that Obasanjo was "playing a waiting game, which is getting more dangerous for the country's political stability."

17. (U) NUPENG has reportedly ordered its employees to withdraw from the oil terminals, which could reduce crude oil exports. They said the decision was based on PENGASSEN's Saturday deadline to withdraw its workers from the oil fields. (COMMENT: Other reliable sources have indicated that NUPENG and PENGASSEN may not join the strike. We are unable to say with certainty which path they will take. END COMMENT.) Representatives for the air traffic controllers say they are joining the strike unless a settlement is reached soon. Domestic air travel has been restricted throughout the week, with one carrier grounded for the entire week and others managing around 50 percent of their scheduled flights. As of now, no major international carrier has cancelled flights into or out of Nigeria, but at least one is considering the prospect of discontinuing operations after Friday.

18. (U) GON officials remain optimistic about the prospect of a settlement today or tomorrow. A GON official told EMBOFF that NLC Executive Council members have been summoned to Abuja to review a potential agreement and that the meeting could take place as early as tonight. The Inspector General of Police issued a public statement denying any fatalities due to police crowd control activities.

A CONFLUENCE OF EVENTS

19. (C) Exacerbating a tense atmosphere in Port Harcourt is the scheduled July 4 memorial service and burial for slain ANPP chieftain Marshall Harry. Many high-level ANPP members plan to attend, including ANPP presidential candidate Muhammadu Buhari.

COMMENT

10. (C) Despite a respite in confrontations today, the strike has shown no sign of weakening and its sympathizers may be getting more strident in some areas. The possibility of NUPENG and PENGASSEN joining the strike and the resultant effect on crude oil production and exports could be a major factor in whether the strike is settled sooner or later, with Labor possibly gaining a huge advantage it does not appear to have now.

JETER